GOING TO THE FAIR

BY ALISON UTTLEY

A LITTLE BROWN MOUSE BOOK

PICTURES BY

KATHERINE WIGGLESWORTH

HEINEMANN

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Katherine Wigglesworth

Snug and Serena Meet a Queen

Snug and Serena Pick Cowslips

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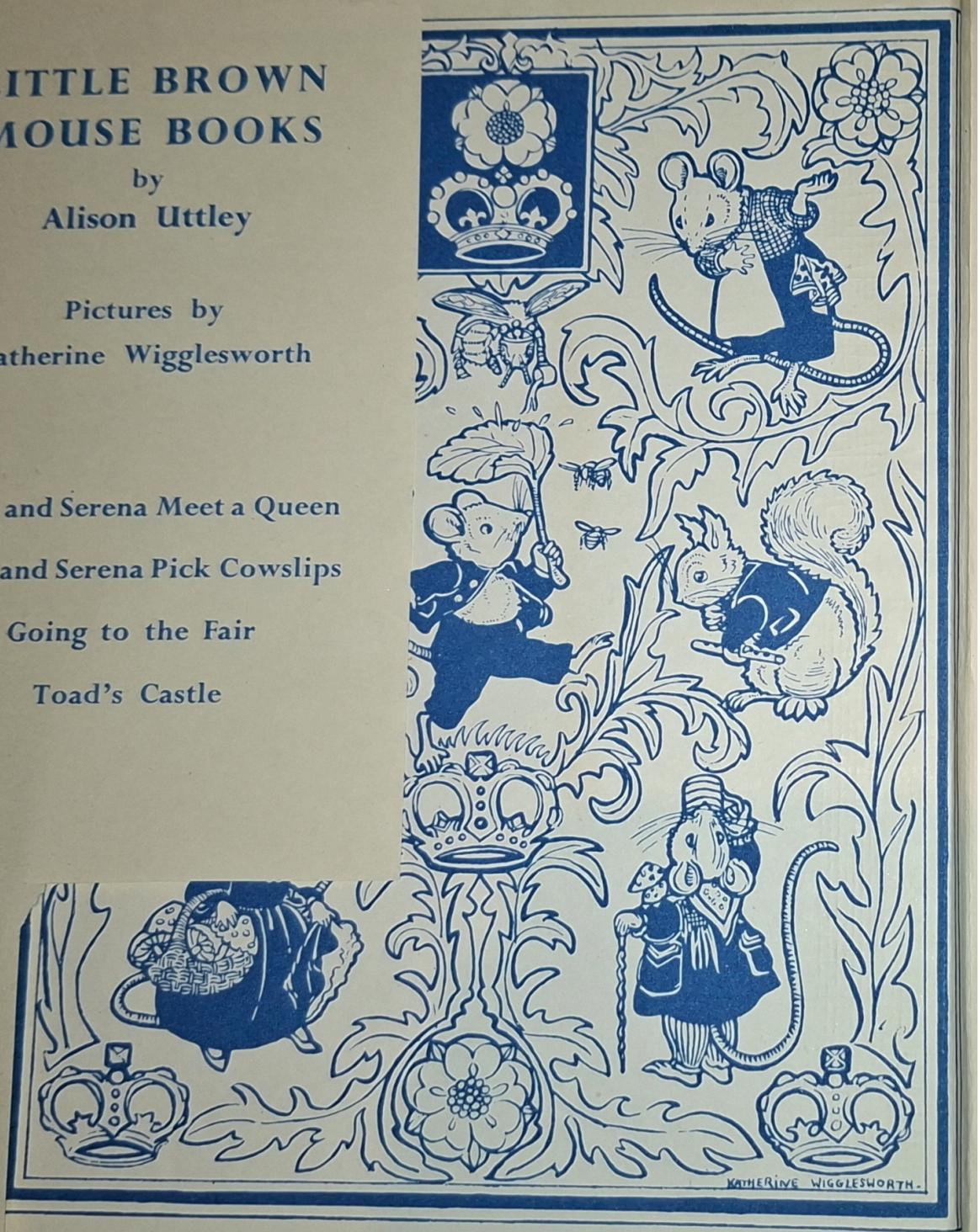
Toad's Castle



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GOING TO THE FAIR

ONE DAY SNUG WAS TROTTING ALONG a green track in the field when he saw a straw house under the hedge. It was very small, and it stood half under the furry leaves of a yellow mullein. It was a caravan made out of wheat-stalks, with a chimney on top, a door at the back, and a handle to pull it along.

At the door sat two harvest mice busily weaving little baskets of straw to hold grain.

Snug hid behind a dandelion, but the mice had seen him.

"HO! HO! LITTLE BROWN MOUSE. I see you hiding there", said Mrs. Harvest.

"Come and give a hand, Snug," called her husband.

Snug came shyly forward.

"How do you know my name?" he asked.

"BY YOUR RED TROUSERS, YOUNG Mousekin," said Mr. Harvest. "I saw 'em once at the 'Rose and Crown'."

"As red as corn poppies," added Mrs. Harvest.

"Can't help seeing you," said Mr. Harvest. "But never mind our jokes. Just take a peep at the caravan."

SNUG RAN INTO THE STRAW HOUSE which held many little baskets fitted into one another. There was a bunk and a candlestick and a frying-pan and two stools.

"Do you live here?" he asked.

"No, we live in the cornfield," said Mrs. Harvest. "We are basket-makers, on the way to the Fair."

"The Fair?" echoed Snug. "Where is it?"

"In the corner of the orchard," said Mr. Harvest. "Everyone knows about it. You be off home and ask if they've forgotten the May Fair."

AS SNUG RAN HE SAW THE YELLOW skirt of his sister Serena fluttering in the bushes like a brimstone butterfly.

"Hello, Serena," he called. "Have you heard there's a Fair?"

Serena crept out of the gorse where she had been snipping the golden pea-flowers and piling them in a bag for jam-making. The scent was so sweet even her fur smelled of gorse flowers.

"A Fair?" she cried. "Oh, let's go! I've never seen a Fair."

WHEN THEY GOT HOME THERE WAS a chatter and squeak in the "Rose and Crown." A gypsy hedgehog was there, with a basket of clothes-pegs made out of thorns like her own prickles.

"Yes, I'm going to the May Fair," said she. "Once it was in the garden, but that wasn't safe. Now it's in the orchard."

She picked up her basket and then she stared at Snug.

"We shan't miss seeing you, in your red trousers," said she. "You're like a poppy in the corn."

SHE LAUGHED AND AWAY SHE WENT, singing.

"The rude prickly-bob," pouted Snug. "I'm not a poppy in the corn."

"No, you're a rose with many a thorn," said Mr. Mouse, very solemnly, and Snug didn't know whether his father was mocking him or not.

"Now, everybody stop talking," said Mrs. Mouse, ringing her harebell for silence. "We are going to the Fair and we must get ready at once. I don't know why we forgot about it."

"Too busy to listen to gossip," said Mr. Mouse, slowly chewing a straw and polishing a bottle.

GRAPE
CORDIAL

"I SAW SOME BASKET-MAKERS WITH A yellow caravan under the hedge. They told me," cried Snug, eagerly.

"Be quiet and do as you're bid," said Mrs. Mouse. "An unbiddable mouse stays at home. Snug and Serena wash yourselves. William, take off that apron and put on your ruby coat. We must hurry."

Mrs. Mouse bustled around making lettuce and egg sandwiches. Serena and Snug washed their faces and brushed their fur. Mr. Mouse struggled into his best coat.

HE PUT A BOTTLE OF DANDELION wine in one big pocket and a bottle of herb beer in the other.

"Now are you all ready?" he asked. He pushed his family outside and locked the door.

THE KEY HE HID UNDER A DANDE-lion. Laughing, talking, singing, the four set off down the narrow track at the side of the lane. They kept to the grass where they were safe. The path was worn by many small feet pattering there all day long and sometimes into the night.

THEY CAME TO A LADYBIRD IN HER spotted cloak. She had dropped her basket down a crack in the rock. Mr. Mouse pushed his tail into the hole and drew up the basket on the tip.

"Thank you, Mr. Mouse," said the ladybird.

They saw a butterfly fast in a spider's web and little Snug unfastened the knots of silken rope and set her free.

"Thank you, Snug," said the butterfly.

On they went, sipping from the honey-bags of the white dead-nettle, nibbling the sweet hawthorn leaves, biting sour wood-sorrel, blowing at dandelion clocks to find the time.

"OH, THERE'S THE CARAVAN WITH THE basket-makers," cried Snug, and over the grass trundled the little yellow house, with Mrs. Harvest pushing and Mr. Harvest pulling it.

"Going to the Fair?" called Mr. Mouse, and the harvest mice nodded, and stopped a moment to mop their brows before they went on.

"A HARD-WORKING COUPLE, THOSE harvest mice," said Mr. Mouse. "Good weavers and very knowledgeable about corn."

Now they could hear the tinkling of flowery bells, the rattle of grasses, the music of a fiddle and a harp of silvery tone.

IN THE ORCHARD AMONG THE FLOWERS of spring, the Fair was held. At first the mice walked about, looking at the stalls, admiring the display. There were piles of golden wheat and barley, of dried acorns and cobnuts, which had been stored all the winter and were put out for sale. Brown cakes and sugar sticks were heaped on broad sycamore leaves and toys made by cunning paws and sharp teeth lay on the low stones under the apple trees.

LITTLE ANIMALS HURRIED TO AND fro, emptying their baskets for the customers to buy and the customers strolled about and met their friends and relations. Hedgehogs stood in one corner, buying clothes-pegs and teazle-brushes from the gypsy. A mole strolled over the grass in his black velvet waistcoat and Wat Hare leapt up and down with a cowslip-ball.

"HOW D'Y'DO, MR. MOUSE? HOW ARE you, William? How's your family?" cried the small animals. They waved their tails and shook their dainty paws and nodded their bright heads as they welcomed the family of field-mice to the Fair.

Mrs. Mouse and Serena loitered by a ribbon stall, and they bought some green-striped ribbon-grasses which had come from the garden beyond the wall.

THEY FOUND A RED PIN-CUSHION and a walnut-shell box. There was a doll, too, made of poppy-petals and Serena bought it for a mouse-penny.

Mr. Mouse chose a corkscrew and a basket of barley for his store-room, and Snug begged for a whip and top.

Suddenly, when all were enjoying themselves, a drum sounded, a rabbit's foot thumped the earth, and a trumpet squeaked. It was the alarm for DANGER!

Every little animal dropped to the ground and disappeared, either in the shelter of the wall,

or down one of the narrow passages which go underground in fields and lanes and pastures to the safety caverns of the small animals of the wild. With them went Snug and Serena, running as fast as their little legs would carry them, Mrs. Mouse panting behind and Mr. Mouse following his family.

"What is it, father? A lion?" asked Snug, trembling with excitement. Serena held her mother's dress and clung close to her.

"Only a hawk, my son," said Mr. Mouse, calmly. "Always hide when a wind-hover appears. If you don't hide, then be still and it may not see you."

RIBBONS AND LACES FELL TO THE ground, toys were scattered. The harvest mice had gone into their caravan, the hedgehogs rolled themselves in balls. The animals whispered as they watched the hawk's shadow pass over the ground. Then away flew the keen-eyed bird and the Fair went on.

"Oh dear!" sighed Mrs. Mouse. "It makes my heart go pit-a-pat. I can't abide hawks. They are like cats flying up there, with sharp eyes and fierce claws."

"Why, there's Timothy Snout and Samuel Furze and John Barleycorn," shouted Mr. Mouse, hailing his old friends.

"HO, TIMOTHY! HO, SAMUEL! HO, John!" he called. "The wind-hover didn't catch you, then?"

"Too tough," laughed Timothy.

"Too lean," grunted John Barleycorn.

"Too old," sighed Samuel Furze. "What are you doing here?"

"I've brought my family to see the Fair," said Mr. Mouse, and Mrs. Mouse bobbed a curtsey and the three ancient mice bowed to her.

"Join us at dinner," suggested Mrs. Mouse. "We have enough for everybody. Come and sit with us."

SO THEY SAT ON THE SUNNY BANK TO eat their sandwiches and to drink the dandelion and herb beer. John Barleycorn brought a few honey cakes from his pocket, and laid them on the grass, and Timothy added a round cheese his wife had made. Then Samuel put out a lardy-cake,—and what a feast they had!

Snug and Serena dipped their toes in the stream and fished for minnows with rods made of green rushes. Tim Rabbit came up and played his flute for them to dance.

LITTLE TOM HEDGEHOG SHOWED Serena how to play darts, and Wat Hare tossed his cowslip ball into her lap for a present.

"Now we'll go and buy some fairings," said Timothy Snout, and he took his leather purse from his pocket and counted his green pennies.

For Serena he bought a necklace of blue beads, made from the seeds of a rare flower in the garden.

SNUG CHOSE A HUMMING-TOP WHICH played a tune. It had been carved from a nut by a champion carver.

Then Snug wandered off alone, exploring the big orchard. "There's music somewhere," he whispered to himself, and, indeed, a queer little air had been tinkling through the Fair ground, setting nimble feet a-dancing, although the musician was hidden.

BEHIND THE BEE-HIVE, HANGING from the low bough of an apple-tree was a swing, and near it fat Pin Hedgehog, ragged and rough, played a mouth-organ.

"Can I have a swing?" asked Snug, holding out his penny, and the old scarecrow nodded.

"Be ye careful. Many a Mouse gets Missed," said he.

THEN AWAY SOARED THE SWING, UP towards the sky, down to the ground. The wind rushed through Snug's fur and the wide world seemed to be swinging too, as the music of the mouth-organ sang below.

A SHADOW FELL ON THE GRASS, THE drum beat, the rabbit thumped its foot for DANGER, and the alarm trumpet sounded. Every animal fled to shelter, except little Snug who went on swinging.

"STOP! STOP!" CRIED THE SHOWMAN, taking cover, but it was too late. Down like a stone fell the hawk, down to the earth, for its eye had caught the gleam of Snug's red trousers. Then with Snug in its claws it rose in the air. It held Snug firmly by his trousers, and it carried him to the church tower where it had its nest.

All the young hawks were waiting for dinner. They put their heads over the edge of the nest and watched their mother circling with a scrap of red and blue in her claws.

"THERE'S SOMETHING SPECIAL TOday," they told each other with shrill cries of hunger.

"Here's little Red Trousers for your dinner," called the hawk, resting on the ledge of the tower.

"Please, please, please," squeaked Snug.

"You are not very fat after all," said the hawk, sternly. "You are all red trousers. I must get something else to add to you. You are only a morsel among my family."

THE HAWK FASTENED SNUG TO THE iron weather-cock by his trousers and coat, and there he hung, swinging in the wind, while all the young birds cried for him.

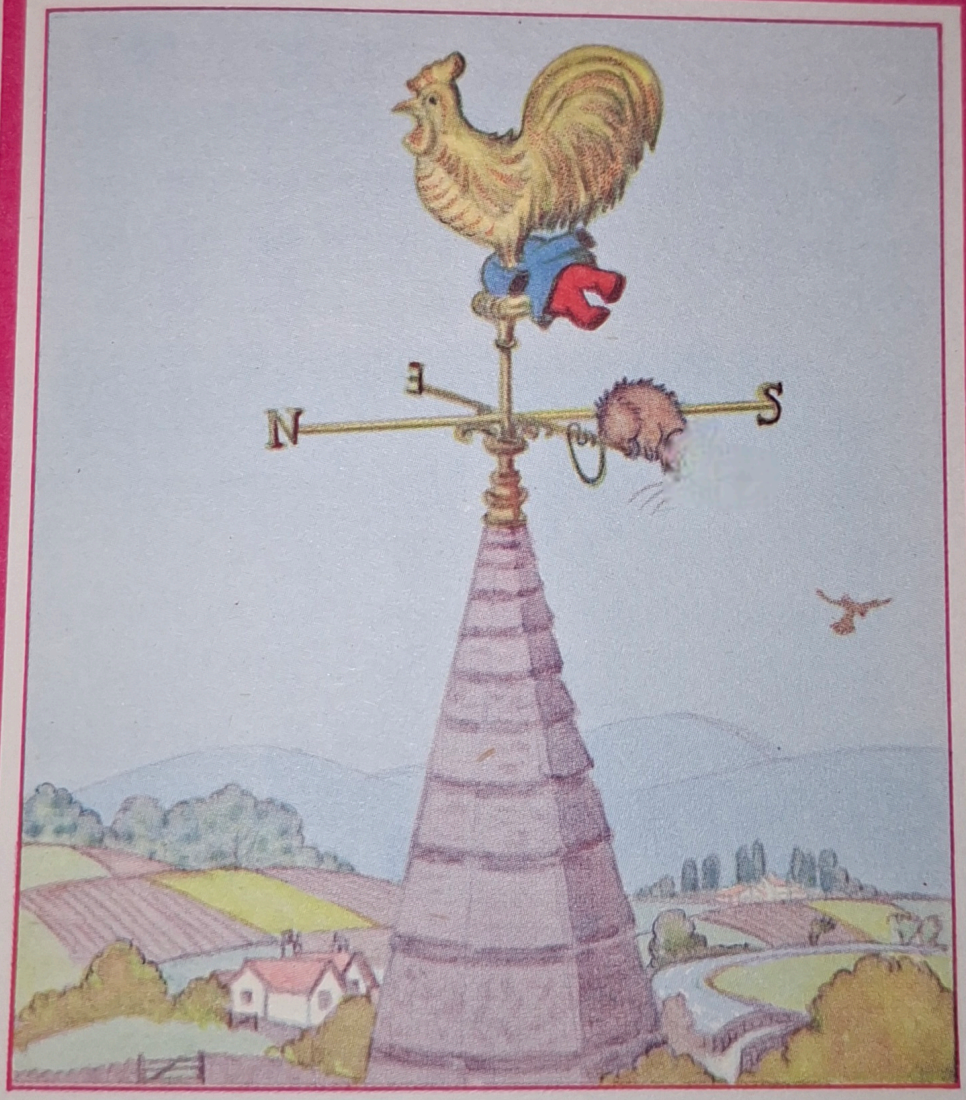
Down flew the hawk, circling the valley, seeking more food.

Snug struggled but could not get free; he was fastened very securely with the iron spikes through his clothes.

HE DRAGGED ONE ARM FROM HIS jacket and then the other. Holding the metal foot of the weather-cock, he slipped his thin legs out of the trousers, which flapped in the wind. He hung by his tail for a moment, while his little coat and trousers ballooned on the weather-cock, just as if he were inside them.

He took one look at the earth far below, he gave a faint cry and then he dived into the air.

He landed, dazed and bruised, on a patch of moss, and he just managed to creep into the shelter of some ferns when the hawk returned.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"QUICK! WE ARE HUNGRY!" SCREAMed the little hawks, as the mother went to the weather-cock to seize the empty jacket and coat.

"Gone! Vanished!" cried the astonished hawk. "He was a magical mouse, my children!"

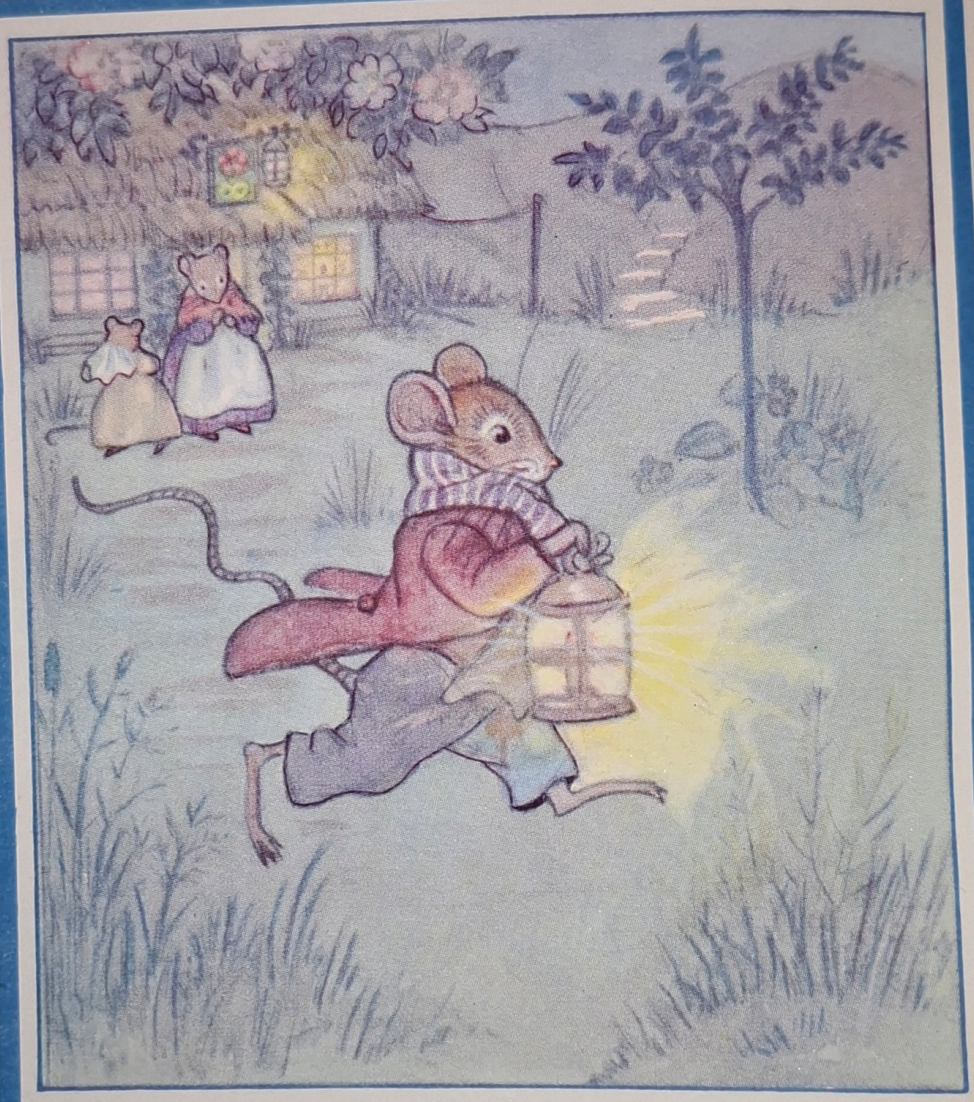
Snug lay very still. After a time a ladybird found him and she gave him a spotted cloak to wrap round him. It was so small Snug used it as a handkerchief to dry his tears. A butterfly hovered near, and she gave him a sip of honey to revive him. Two ants brought an oak leaf to cover him. A sunbeam warmed him, and a spider spun a web over his cuts and hurts.

HE LAY THERE UNTIL IT WAS DUSK, when he ventured out. He wandered a long way, lost in the wide countryside, until suddenly he saw the gleam of a tiny light. He crept up, and he tapped on a tiny door.

In the meantime Mr. and Mrs. Mouse and Serena were hunting everywhere.

THE OLD SHOWMAN HEDGEHOG TOLD how a hawk, a wind-hover, had carried off the little mouse.

"It was the red trousers, ma'am," explained Pin Hedgehog. "Nobody would have spied him if he had worn a sober colour. Too bright he was, like a poppy in a cornfield."



SADLY THEY WENT HOME TO THE "ROSE and Crown." At night Mrs. Mouse put a lighted candle in her window, and Mr. Mouse hung a lantern from the porch. He went out to ask all his friends to look for little Snug in field and dell.

"I'll go and hunt for him," said Mr. Toad, who was wandering in the lane.

Off he waddled and first he saw Policeman Owl sailing serenely over the hedge.

"TAWNY! TAWNY!" HE CALLED. "HAVE you seen little Snug?"

"Too-whit, too-whoo," hooted Tawny Owl. "I saw a pair of red trousers on the weather-cock, but nobody was inside them."

"Eaten up," sighed the Toad. "It's that hawk." He asked moles, hedgehogs, bit-bats, snails, but nobody had seen little Snug. He trudged across the fields, and over the common. He was just going to turn back when he heard muffled laughter. He stopped. A small shrill voice was singing and he recognized the song.

"OH, THE 'ROSE AND THE CROWN',
With green leaves and brown,
In summer and spring
The turtle doves sing,
At the 'Rose and the Crown'.
It is fit for a King,
Is the 'Rose and the Crown'."

"Where is he? Where is the varmint hiding?" cried Toad.

The laughter came from a bunch of straw in the tall wet grasses. A glow-worm light shone in a window.

"IS THAT YOU, SNUG?" CALLED TOAD. The tiny door opened and a flood of light streamed out. Mrs. and Mrs. Harvest and Snug looked down from the straw caravan.

"Oh, Mr. Toad," cried Snug, leaping down the step. "Come inside. We're having supper."

"Where have you been, Snug? Do you know your poor father is looking for you and your mother is weeping and your poor sister is a-mourning you? Here you are, enjoying yourself. You ought to be ashamed!"

TOAD WAS VERY INDIGNANT.

"Please sir," interrupted Mr. Harvest. "Please, we found him lost and cold without his trousers and bruised with tumbling from the top of the church steeple. So we bandaged him and gave him a good feed and now he is singing to us."

"Yes, Mr. Toad," said Snug, showing his bandages.

"THANK YOU VERY MUCH," CRIED Toad, shaking hands with the harvest mice. "Thank you, and if you come to the 'Rose and Crown', Mr. William Mouse will thank you himself."

The harvest mice said it had been a pleasure to entertain such a knowing little mouse as Snug.

"Now come along with me," said Mr. Toad, taking Snug's arm, and they crept slowly home.

WHAT A GREETING THERE WAS WHEN they arrived! What drinks of hot milk with a sprig of lemon balm to keep out the cold, and sips of ginger wine, and sups of barley brew stirred with sugar candy!

"Oh, my darling Snug," cried Mrs. Mouse, throwing her arms round little Snug, so that he nearly choked. "I am so glad to see you safe and sound. Never mind your old trousers. I will make a new pair tomorrow."

"NOT RED ONES," IMPLORED SNUG. "I don't want to be a poppy in the corn. I want to be invisible like the harvest mice. Then I can help them with haymaking and gleaning."

"Well, we'll see," promised Mrs. Mouse, smiling.

She bathed Snug's bruises in sweet balsam from her herb cupboard, and put on ointment of self-heal. The next day the little mouse was completely cured with never an ache or pain.

SHE STITCHED AND STITCHED WITH her tiny needle and made a pair of brown trousers and a shadowy blue coat just like the smoke from a wood fire.

At night Snug skipped out to dance in the moonlight and Serena danced with him, and the stars shone and the sign of the "Rose and Crown" was bright in the moonrays.

"Hello, Snug," whispered the harvest mice, and Snug saw their straw caravan drawn up under a foxglove.

"HERE WE ARE," SAID MRS. HARVEST, shyly.

"Welcome! Welcome!" shouted Mr. Mouse, as they walked in the house. "Come and sit by my fire. Meet all my friends. Here's Mr. Toad, and Samuel and John Barleycorn, and Timothy, and my wife, all wishing to thank you."

So they had supper, and the young ones sat on the floor for there wasn't room at the table. They drank glasses of cowslip wine and sang merry songs, and toasted Mr. and Mrs. Harvest.

AT LAST THEY ALL WENT TO BED,—the Toad in the guest room, the three old mice on the kitchen floor with the dormouse, and the harvest mice in the caravan. Snug begged to sleep there too, and he lay on a heap of straw, in the tiny yellow house.

The next day the caravan went away, filled with good food and bottles of herb beer.

"WE'LL SEE YOU AGAIN, AFTER THE harvest," called the little couple, "Goodbye, Mr. Mouse, and Mrs. Mouse. Goodbye, Serena and Snug. Goodbye, Mr. Toad."

They trundled the caravan down the lane among the ferns and buttercups, and soon it was out of sight.

"Well, I'll be getting along," said Mr. Toad. "I must return to my Castle, or they will think I, too, have been carried off by a hawk."

THE END OF THE STORY

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